

NORTH CAROLINA

Department of Transportation

Public Transportation Division

Streamline Grant Process for Public Transportation

As requested in Section Law 2011-145, Section 28.20.(a)

March 2, 2012

This report is in response to Session Law 2011-145, House Bill 200, Section 28.20.(a) relating to the status of grant streamlining and maximization of funds for Public Transportation.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation implemented the Enterprise Grants Management System under the name of Partner Connect. This is an online grant system managed by NCDOT that allows grant sub-recipients to securely log into and utilize the grant system relating to their transit system. The grant system is inclusive of:

- Program Management
- Budgeting
- Application
- Assessment
- Agreement
- Payment
- Monitoring
- Audit Reporting
- Grant Closeout

The planning, design and testing phase of the system occurred June 2010 through April 2011. The system went live for NCDOT staff in April 2011 and went live for grantees in August 2011. The grantees were introduced to the system through hands-on training sessions held across the state during the months of August and September 2011. The grantees began submitting their first applications in the new system in the month of November 2011.

Partner Connect benefits NCDOT management by efficiently maximizing employee time spent on the following management activities:

- Managing program budget
- Tracking grant application status
- Monitoring the agreements
- Analyzing data
- Performing program audits

Partner Connect benefits the grant recipients by having one central secure location to perform all grant activities such as:

- Submitting grant applications
- Viewing the status of the applications in the review process and award of the grant
- Submitting invoices for reimbursement
- Submitting budget revisions and amendments
- Performing program tracking
- Viewing grant budgets and balances

Partner Connect is a secure system that utilizes a unique user name and password per authorized grantee employee. A PIN is required during the agreement and claim reimbursement processes.

Partner Connect is a better grant tool and generates the following best practices:

- Reduces manual processes and workload
- Improves transparency and auditability of grant program activities
- Controls unallowable costs
- Enables controls to ensure that each grant follows required regulations
- Streamlines grant activities from proposal to closeout
- Integrates grant-related reports within Business Warehouse (data storage)
- Increases sponsor satisfaction with management of funds, potentially increasing external funding
- Accelerates the Public Transportation Division going green by eliminating paper

The next steps for Partner Connect are to add the following online databases that will increase the streamlining and efficiency of the grant process. Discussion with programmers to design the below databases will occur in March 2012.

- Program Accomplishment Reporting
- Vehicle inventory and maintenance performance
- Training and safety performance
- DBE/MBE/WBE contracts and payments

In an effort to maximize the usage of state grant funds to leverage federal funds, NCDOT held seven (7) workshops across the state in July 2011 to inform urban and rural transit systems how to use state operating funds to better leverage all eligible federal transit operating funds. The workshops also promoted the federal grant programs and allowed grantees to obtain a better understanding of those programs. These workshops created an increase in federal operating grant applications, resulting in more federal funds being used for local transit system operating costs and maximized the usage of state operating funds to match those federal funds.

The Public Transportation Division has also exercised the flexibility of transferring several program funds such as rural capital, urban technology, and human service transportation management (per Section 28.18 and Section 28.19 of SL 2011-145) to operating program funds during fiscal year 2011-2012. This has allowed local transit systems to better meet their operating needs, and has increased flexibility for regional systems to apply and expend funds for multicounty transit needs.